

End of long road is in sight

Work on last part of Del. 1 to resume Monday

By Drew Volturo
Staff writer

SMYRNA — Construction work on Del. 1 has entered the final stretch, with the last piece of the Bear-to-Dover expressway targeted for completion before Memorial Day.

The limited-access highway has existed in two segments for several years, with only the length between Odessa and Smyrna remaining.

Work on the eight-mile stretch will resume Monday after a three-month winter break, said David B. Duke, project resident engineer for the state Department of Transportation.

An unusually cold and oppressive winter did not affect progress on the roadway because the period between Dec. 15 and March 15 is viewed as "downtime" for DelDOT, Mr. Duke said.

"Any work we get done during the winter is considered a bonus," he said. "This avoids the possibility of us falling behind."

Mr. Duke said less than 20 percent of his work remains. He is responsible for the areas where U.S. 13 and Del. 1 tie into each other at Odessa and Smyrna.

The remainder of the \$22.2 million project will include the construction of detour roads, shoulders and the installation of guardrails, signs, road striping and topsoil, he said.

The five-mile section in between is about 90 percent complete, he said, and costs

\$39.1 million.

The grand opening of the final segment is slated for May 18-20 and will not include any additional tolls. There currently are toll plazas in Dover and at Biddles Corner, charging \$1 each.

Mr. Duke said there is a tremendous amount of work remaining in a small window of time and workers will need good weather to aid them.

"If we have bad weather, we will have to make it up with either additional hours or working on (weekends)," he said. "We will make the May date."

He said it is frustrating to see the forecast calling for cold or rainy weather, but he remains positive that the project will be done on time, before Memorial Day weekend.

Switching Del. 1 traffic that merges onto U.S. 13 at Smyrna and Odessa will be very complex, Mr. Duke said.

"It will be a real challenge for us, the road builders, and for the traveling public," he said.

Mr. Duke said DelDOT would advertise the exact plans for the switch as the project's completion nears.

The full opening of Del. 1 will be welcomed by Carol Everhart, executive director of the Rehoboth Beach-Dewey Beach Chamber of Commerce.

"Any enhancement or additional convenience for travel-

ers can only be a benefit to the chamber," she said.

"Return visitors will be pleased to spend less time on the road, and new visitors are always looking for quick routes in and out of the area."

DelDOT spokesman Michael Williams said the department did not have an estimate on how much time the segment of Del. 1 would save travelers, but noted that the same stretch of U.S. 13 has two traffic lights and a speed limit 10 mph slower.

When the other sections of Del. 1 opened, traffic diminished on U.S. 13, said Delaware State Police spokesman Lt. Timothy Winstead, and that trend should continue.

"Nonlocal traffic — people going from Wilmington to Dover or further south — will likely use (Del.) 1 the whole time," he said.

"A limited access roadway like (Del.) 1 creates a greater flow of traffic and hopefully facilitates safer travel."

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